

Kathleen's Quilt

I would like to share with you today about a remarkable person, Kathleen Bolton. Let us speak of how she quilted a life of loving devotion to her friends - human and canine and other; a life of healing and caring for those who were ill or dying; a life of nurturing and developing others; a life of practical celebration through laughter and mischief.

In quilting, there is a group project called piece-quilting, where several people come together with various pieces of fabric to create a quilt and this is how Kathleen naturally moved through her life. She pieced together a life-quilt organically comprised of those of us from diverse communities: the canine caregiving community, the nursing profession, the leather community, the women's and lesbian communities, the gay community, the legal profession, and her friends and family.

NURSING

Kathleen and I met 20 years ago in the late 80s doing home care nursing and we became fast friends and general partners-in-crime. During these dark times for the gay community, we encountered much grief and sorrow and challenges at every turn, as we cared for PWAs, their friends and families, and for each other. Kathleen continued working in home health care as I moved on to other endeavors. We remained in touch and I would often check in to see how she was faring. Her clinical excellence was well complimented by her sense of genuine affection for the many patients that she touched as she nursed them, sometimes into healing back into life and often into healing by release through death.

She liked to remind me of my calling her one day to see how she was doing and of talking her into meeting me at an intersection: it wasn't difficult as she was an adventurous person. About 30 minutes later, we were both lying in the street, participating in a rowdy and raucous protest. She trusted me, that I would help and heal her and we did that for each other. We both learned that putting our bodies in the middle of a highly visible public thoroughfare in an act of civil disobedience was a powerful way to speak out for those in our care, our sisters, brothers, and others in our community, and was a healing way to release the weariness of our daily grind as nurses caring for those that we knew were suffering from HIV and for the many that we all lost during those dark days.

Kathleen had a particularly calming presence that seemed to come naturally and she knew how to differentially apply it in her work as a nurse. She taught me how she would "Valium-voice" over the phone certain doctors who were unfortunately a bit difficult to deal with in the every day world of nursing. She was incredibly skilled in this regard! She could calm down the grumpiest, most cantankerous physician, and procure the patient's needed treatments. Kathleen was a fearless advocate for those in her care.

Several years later, when both of us and others developed fibromyalgia, she was exceptionally resourceful in coping with this condition. I credit her having walked that path before me with significantly helping so many people. Kathleen was a tireless, courageous advocate for trying one more thing, a different technique, this herb, that bodywork, this energy work, until something worked.

No matter how long it had been since we had talked, whenever we got together or talked over the phone, it always seemed like we had just been together a few minutes earlier. She always seemed to be there and in touch, a truly amazing gift of timelessness. Her familiarity was, indeed, familial and she told me only a few months ago that what we had to do was to take care of each other, that that was what we were supposed to do, because that's what family does for family.

This is how Kathleen fostered Josh, helping out a friend from an earlier period in life by taking in her friend's son when he was at the doorway to adolescence, to raise and care for him. She provided structure, discipline, nurturing, and a sense of joyful whimsy. As difficult as it was, she managed to let go when it was time for him to move out of her life.

Kathleen's journey took her out of direct nursing practice and into legal nurse consulting, where she skilfully applied her fabulous organizational and case management skills to her work. She had an eye for detail and thoroughness that inspired confidence in those around her. Kathleen never hesitated to consult a colleague when she had the need, because she was conscientious and highly ethical. Her concern, as always, was for the patient or client's best interests. These attributes were fundamental in both her vocation and her life, providing a rock-steady foundation for her numerous talents and abilities. When the time came for her to create a website, we worked on it together and continued to do so over several years. Kathleen was a post-modern woman who embraced the changes that she encountered on her journey in life. She was a polymath, good at everything that she learned and tried.

Socially, Kathleen was at home with virtually every kind of individual and every type of tribe. She was equally at home hanging out with her dyke sisters as she was with her gay brothers. At my 50th birthday party, she was the only woman! She always fit right in with the boys, as she called us, laughing and having a grand old time. She always told me that she loved hanging out with my friends, who at a recent celebration on April 20th, lovingly paused to honor and raise a glass to our beloved Kathleen.

DOGGIES

It was a pleasure to go dog-walking with Kathleen or to go anywhere with Kathleen and her doggies. She was simply an astonishing natural human companion, caregiver, and trainer for dogs. Watching her work with dogs often felt like being immersed in a fantastical world where humans and dogs spoke with each other, because she knew how to talk with and listen to doggies. Kathleen once remarked, in response to my comment that a certain dog was smiling a lot, that “you’d be surprised at the things dogs could do”: naturally, she was profound in this statement.

She fostered the dogs for which others had given up or had been almost ready to be released from this life, nurturing and training them into sociable creatures who then went on to loving families. Kathleen had this way about her when she spoke to her dogs that made them listen. It was fun to watch her tell a dog “gentle, gentle” when treats were given. She taught her dogs manners, teaching them to look away from people eating when the words “excuse me” were spoken to them. She

seemed to always materialize treats for her doggies out of thin air. I watched as dogs flourished under her loving hand and eye, coming back to life after awful experiences.

Kowalski, in his book, *The Souls of Animals*, tells us that the word “animal” comes from the Latin word, *animale*, which itself comes from the word, *anima*, meaning soul. Kathleen was a great soul and she connected spiritually with all creatures, exemplified by her relationship with her beloved doggies.

Her abilities with dogs came from a deep understanding that dogs teach us about unqualified love, about unconditional forgiveness, and that they simply do not lie or deceive, that dogs mostly just misunderstand or are misunderstood. Kathleen understood them and taught them clarity in their relations with others, be they canine or human or other.

CLOSING WORDS

Kathleen brought together the strands of family, of friendship, of community and tribe, of time, and of spirit, as Louv explores in his book, *The Web of Life*. The pieces of Kathleen's quilt are therefore those of deep empathy, compassion, celebration of one's identity, joyful living, and the true art of caring for one's self and for others. Let us gently wrap ourselves in Kathleen's quilt and remember that to love one another is perhaps the highest calling of all.

Kathleen healed, inspired, and touched everyone that knew her. She was truly a *mahatma*: a great soul, in her selflessness and high-mindedness. Kathleen has returned to the Source, the

World Soul, back to that Great Spirit who birthed and blessed us with her loving presence for 50 years.

May Kathleen's warmth, affection, gentleness, kindness, authenticity, and humor give us wisdom and warm us as we leave this place, this time of remembrance and celebration of her life. Let us celebrate her remarkable life by following Kathleen's example to love one another.

PLEASE JOIN HANDS

This is a Celtic prayer to Kathleen.

SOUL-LEADING FOR SOMEONE WHO HAS DIED SUDDENLY OR UNEXPECTEDLY

You have been called from the place of your dwelling,
After times, after duties, after separations.
May blessed soul-friends guide you,
May helping spirits lead you,
May the Gatherer of Souls call you,
May the homeward path rise up under your feet
And lead you gladly home.

Blessed be.